

Keep Measure A in Alameda

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The Truth About Helen Sause's Track Record

Measure A opponents tell a smooth, sweet story about Helen Sause and HOMES, and how they are so concerned about affordable housing on Alameda Point. The truth about Helen Sause's track record isn't that sweet, however.

Helen Sause was the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's (SFRA) Project Director for Yerba Buena Gardens for 17 years. Yerba Buena Gardens was an 87-acre urban redevelopment project in the South of Market (SOMA) district of San Francisco. It includes a mixture of housing, open space, cultural facilities, children's facilities, a convention center and commercial development. The redevelopment area was defined in 1961, and demolition began in 1967. From 1969 to 1975, there were various lawsuits filed that halted the development. One was the successful 1970 to 1973 lawsuit by the Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment (TOOR).

TOOR was an organization of poor and elderly tenants living in rundown residential hotels and apartments in the redevelopment area. Their lawsuit forced the SFRA to provide for low-income housing on the Yerba Buena site. 963 living units for the homeless, hotel tenants and persons with disabilities were created. The poor, elderly and minorities that didn't receive housing in the new Yerba Buena Gardens were brushed aside to San Francisco neighborhoods like Bayview and Hunters Point.

The SFRA fought the TOOR lawsuit for four years. Helen Sause is no angel descended from Heaven to save affordable housing for low-income families. The Yerba Buena Gardens project she managed drove low-income people out of their homes and provided for the elderly and poor only after a protracted lawsuit. The Yerba Buena Gardens web site gives credit to Helen Sause for getting the project done. Helen Sause is no altruistic community activist, but a well-connected, well-tenured, big-money property developer. It would seem that Helen Sause and HOMES want to transform Alameda Point into some version of downtown San Francisco.

Supporting Links:

<http://www.yerbabuenagardens.com/history.html>

<http://www.todco.org/corporatehistory.html>

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HOMES Ignore's Housing Element Text on Measure A

Conveniently, HOMES continues to ignore text pertaining to Measure A in the current City of Alameda Housing Element document available from the City's web site. HOMES keeps chanting slogans that are clearly contradicted in the Housing Element. Here are some excerpts:

Some critics of Measure A have argued that by limiting new multi-family developments, Measure A restricts the proportion of low income households in Alameda, discriminates against minorities seeking to locate in the City of Alameda and restricts the mix of housing types. However it appears from objective analysis that Measure A has not had these effects.

And further:

One might expect the City's implementation of Measure A to mean that the City has not authorized any apartment-type housing units, (that is, units in buildings with three or more housing units.) In fact, the City has approved and the Housing Authority has constructed 358 units (186 for senior households and 172 for families) since 1974. Furthermore, Alameda has a relatively large percentage of multi-family units compared to other cities in the East Bay. Fifty percent of all units are in structures with two or more units. Over 18 percent are in structures with two to four units, which is up from 17 percent in 1989.¹

Because the Charter Amendment was considered a restrictive housing policy, some people voiced concerns at the time of adoption and later during the preparation of the 1990 Housing Element that:

The City's housing growth rates could be adversely affected because high-density multi-family housing could not be built.

Response: The City of Alameda is currently in a period of considerable growth and anticipates the addition of approximately 3,600 units to the City's housing stock over the next five years. If this development occurs, as many as 1,300 units will be affordable to very low, low, and moderate income families.

The policy would restrict the proportion of low income households in the city.

Response: Communities in the San Francisco Bay Area have experienced a significant increase in housing costs in the last few years, which has exerted pressure on low income families to move to more affordable housing in other communities.

The housing survey indicates that this may be occurring in Alameda. The number of affordable units on the market in Alameda is decreasing due to regional market forces. It is unlikely that Measure A has had an impact. Multi-family units, if built, would be rented at market rate unless publicly subsidized. The proportion of publicly assisted units to market units has increased in the last few years.

The policy would restrict the proportion of minority households in the City.

Response: The City has experienced an increase in minority households to the extent that in 2000 minorities constituted approximately 43 percent of the City's total population compared to approximately 30 percent in 1990.

The City would not have an adequate supply of apartment-type housing units.

Response: Only three cities in Alameda County (Berkeley, Oakland, and Emeryville) exceed the City of Alameda in the proportion of multi-family housing to single family housing. As of January 1, 2000, 50.54 percent of Alameda's housing units were classified as multi-family, of which 10,300 units are in buildings with three or more units. Of the cities in Alameda County with more than 20,000 housing units, Alameda has the fewest number of single-family detached housing units.

While Measure A restricts the type of housing that can be built in Alameda, Measure A does not constitute a significant constraint on the production of affordable housing in Alameda in the context of other governmental and non-governmental constraints, particularly those related to the development of Alameda Point. These constraints are noted earlier in this chapter and include:

- 1) areas subject to tidelands restrictions,*
- 2) the Federal Installation Restoration schedule for contamination remediation,*
- 3) restrictions related to the National Register eligible historic district,*
- 4) US Fish and Wildlife refuge and associated land use restrictions,*
- 5) transfer of military lands,*
- 6) infrastructure reconstruction, and*
- 7) traffic constraints.*

Furthermore, there is no indication that by removing Measure A's limitations, more affordable housing would be built. It should be noted that the City's AB 1600 fees are very competitive, compared to those of surrounding communities. Given prevailing high land and construction costs, new development that is more dense than is permitted under Measure A is not likely to be affordable to very low or low income households.

To the extent that Measure A restricts the type of housing that can be built in Alameda, the record demonstrates that the limitations imposed by Measure A represent a reasonable and justifiable approach to protecting Alameda's historic housing stock and the quality of its existing residential neighborhoods.

Now, Helen Sause surely knows how to find and read the City's Housing Element. Why does she ignore it? Is it because she has a hidden agenda?

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Helen Sause Spirit Continues in San Francisco

Readers trying to understand the redevelopment of The Fillmore, and Yerba Buena Gardens - which Helen Sause of HOMES championed - chronicled in summary elsewhere in this blog, may want to watch a similar scenario unfold in real time.

The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) has now set their sites (pun intended) on the Bayview-Hunters Point district in San Francisco. Agency director Marsha Rosen claims the plan is the fruit of ten-years of work with the community. Just like in the previous projects, there are community members who disagree, and feel that they are simply being pushed out - they accuse the SFRA of trying to wipe-out the last predominantly African American neighborhood in San Francisco. It's interesting to note that in the 1960's, when The Fillmore was being razed, occupancy by "non-whites" was a measure of blight. Marsha Rosen says the agency has learned over the past 30 years. We'll see.

But the point for Alameda residents is this - This Bayview-Hunters Point project is indicative of the path that Helen Sause has travelled in her work with the SFRA. Is this the woman we want setting direction for development in Alameda?

[September 12th, 2006](#) Posted by [keepmeasurea](#) | [Measure A](#) | [No Comments](#)

About Measure A in Alameda

Measure A was enacted in Alameda to prevent overcrowding of the island with high-density, mixed-use development. Developers would love to get their hands on the 1700 acres at Alameda Point, and develop with the highest possible density to maximize their profits. This would be bad for Alameda. Measure A opponents like to talk about "smart growth" for Alameda Point, but they don't realize what an overcrowded, automobile intensive development Alameda Point will become if they have their way.

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On the Backs of the Poor, again.

It's interesting how the commentator speaking of the 'missing rung' in the housing price ladder doesn't dispute my suggestion that HOMES is trying to build homes for above moderate income while mis-leading the public with double-speak about building 'affordable housing' for the poor. This is right in keeping with Helen Sause's background.

As for protecting quality of life for people already living in Alameda, versus those that don't. I suppose this commentator would want to give a vote to non-Alameda residents as well, so they might be able to impact quality of life should they want to move here.

I know 'progressive liberals' like this commentator don't like to think that markets take care of themselves, and we always need some kind of government or other higher authority intervention (which is really what he's asking for - "I can't afford to buy a house, somebody *do* something for me!") but guess what? The housing market in the Bay area is slowing. Rising interest rates and buyer exhaustion have taken their toll. Price appreciation is slowing, and we may be heading for a scenario like the early 90's, when prices dropped twenty percent.

So, if I understand correctly, what this commentator is saying is this - "I don't want markets to adjust themselves; current residents need to risk what they enjoy about Alameda so non-residents might get a piece too; we should add 'vertical sprawl' and look like Manhattan; and it's ok if we do that under the guise of helping the poor."

How progressive is that?

September 15th, 2006 - Posted by [keepmeasurea](#) | [Measure A](#) | [4 Comments](#)

4 Comments »

1. No no no.. and no. You completely misread the reply to the post. let me first say that me and my wife make well over 140k a year. That's well above the 50k average for the area. To say the least, we cannot afford at current prices without investing in outright risky loans that could potentially wreak havoc on our future financial situation. It is likely that many couples before us were not as wise and will shortly be caught in the cataclismic results of yet one more economic fallout as a result of a runaway housing bubble.

What I am saying here is this: The Bay Area has experienced 3 seperate major housing bubbles that have ocured in the last 30 years; since the invention of a plethora of self-serving protective measures like Measure A. Measure A and others unnecessarily supress the amount of available

housing by simply outlawing new developments in an adequate fashion. This in turn is precisely why housing bubbles occur, hence throwing the entire region into painful cycles of ups and downs, with possible nasty recessions inbetween. Is this preventable? Indeed it is, but with measures in place that prevent any kind of modern adaption of noteworthy residential construction, Alameda and California will have this same exact scenario repeat over.. and over.. and over again.

yes- I have read that there will be some- and the word here is “some” below market housing available for lower to middle income families. The last time I checked, almost 80% of the population is now priced out of a home. Thus a measley 1300 homes are hardly enough to even begin to address this issue.

lastly, I’ve been renting here for 7 years. I consider myself as much a resident as the person who has lived in their own home for 30 years. I too have the same concerns about overcrowding, development, and sprawl. But enough is enough. We must find ways to realistically meet the needs of a growing population.

When you speak of “quality of life” and the residents of Alameda, I too am one of those residents, every bit as much as you and the rest of the city. The quality of life for me is vastly different, and for reasons toally beyond my control, and by pieces of legislation that I had no part of.

On a side note, labeling a ligitimate response as a “liberal” response by a liberal person comes to show the true nature of this rather one-sided site. I am by no means a liberal, and am puzzled by your branding of me as such. It makes your reply seemingly less to do with the topic and more to do with a personal characterization.

Enough said. I’m doing my best to make everyone in my age and income bracket(and there are plenty of us) fully aware of what they have the ability to do when it comes to our city’s politics. If they want to make things better for them, then it is now time. An amending of Measure A is not a questionable affair, but a timely affair of when it will happen.

Comment by Willy | September 15, 2006

2. I also wanted to ad that if you want to place an argument on the table concering quality of life, well all you have to do is flip open a Forbe’s, USA today, Wall street journal, or NY times and read. The last 4 years shows most California cities at the bottom of the barrel in terms of quality of life.

Austin TX, Charlotte and Raleigh Durahm, and indeed a whole slew of Souteastern cities beat the living crap out of most of California simply because people are absolutely fed up with the stupidity that lurks under every inch of this state. You have nobody but yourselves to thank. What’s more is that industry- both high tech and reasearch- are leaving here faster than you could ever imagine- for places like North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, and many of the other aforementioned regions. So in essence, perhaps in 10 years the leftover baby-boomers will get to stay in their little victorians, but they’d better hope they don’t have to rely on a job because the economy by then will be down the sh**er.
Quality of life.. heh.. ya whatever.

Comment by Willy | September 15, 2006

3. Willy - you used the term “progressive liberal,” so perhaps I was rash in making the assumption that you too are a liberal.

It’s funny you mention Austin - a liberal oasis in a largely Republican state - and Charlotte and Raleigh. North Carolina was a red state as I recall, although Raleigh I’m sure is like Austin. Charlotte, I don’t know.

But in any event, you enumerate three cities in largely conservative, republican states, having a better quality of life than little old Alameda in mostly democratic, liberal California. There has been plenty of public debate surrounding the question of state-wide liberal policies causing the problems you speak of in California. Why, the governor just approved a bill increasing the minimum wage, which I know will threaten one small business that I am invested in, putting part-timers out of work as well as one single mother who depends on the business for her income.

As for Measure A - can you please provide details on the “other” Measure A’s for other cities in the Bay area that have artificially driven up home values? Why do you think that anyone has a right to live in Alameda, or live in the Bay area?

Do you deny that home price appreciation in the Bay area is slowing, even with those measures?

And do you deny that house prices dropped 20 to 30% in the early '90s in the Bay area, even with those measures in place?

I bought my first and second home with far less household income than you. Before living in Alameda, I lived in Fremont, and I owned my home. Before that, I rented in Alameda. If I could do it, why can't you? With \$140K per year, are you putting yourself in the same category as the truly poor like the very low and low income people in the HUD table? Tsk, tsk.

You just sound like an angry renter trying to find a scapegoat.

Comment by [keepmeasurea](#) | September 15, 2006

4. Willy:

If your family income is 140M and you can't afford to buy in Alameda, something is wrong. Two possibilities:

A) You can't manage your money. You have too much consumer or auto debt, bad credit, or some other budget issue.

B) You want too much. Is a condo or starter home beneath you?

Is it one of these or something else?

Your comments on quality of life have some merit in the financial/job sense — those places have lower taxes & regulations, making them more attractive to many businesses. You ignore however, many other aspects of quality of life. Climate, for example, is vastly superior here than in any of those palces.

Comment by dave | September 18, 2006

Leave a comment

Name (required)

e-Mail (required - will not be published)

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The Elite Anti-Measure A Crowd in Alameda

The anti-Measure A crowd in Alameda are all over the place. One minute they're blaming long-time resident "fuddy-duddies" for Measure A, the next minute they're blaming young newcomers in the tony east-end district of Alameda. In between they're dissing Alameda city council candidates who support Measure A, chastising them for living in the higher property value districts of Alameda.

But let's take a look at "willy" who posted on my blog previously. Let's see what he has to say:

let me first say that me and my wife make well over 140k a year. That's well above the 50k average for the area.

So I guess that puts 'willy' out of the traditional very low income, low income and moderate income household categories that are traditionally defined as needing "affordable housing." But wait! HOMES says they want to provide "affordable housing" for those that don't traditionally qualify for affordable housing. So poor willy, with a household income of \$140K per year, needs help to buy a home. Quick, does someone have a violin?

Or take Ben Kruger, a Measure A critic and someone very active on blogs and other forums touting the HOMES party line. I guess poor Ben must need help with affordable housing too or something. Why, here's poor Ben Kruger proudly showing off his new BMW 330i with sports package on his own blog. That's easily a \$40,000 vehicle. And oh! Wait! Is that Bayport I see in the background? The newest, shiniest neighborhood in Alameda with million dollar homes? Does Ben and his new car both need affordable housing for those that wouldn't otherwise qualify for affordable housing? Oh, no, Ben's not asking for help for affordable housing. He's asking for donations to go the BMW driving school so he can drive bigger, badder BMWs.

